



ARCHERY Program Finds Bull's-eye

Story and Photos by Luann Dart

As the arrow thwacks the target's bull's-eye, the young archer pumps a fist and erupts in exuberance. It's the same elation that follows a game-winning goal or a buzzer-beating slam dunk. The sport of archery has found its own bull's-eye in schools across North Dakota.

The National Archery in the Schools Program has put bows and arrows in the hands of about 8,500 youth in North Dakota since 2005. Coordinated through a partnership between North Dakota State University Extension Service and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, NASP offers matching grant funds to schools to purchase archery equipment, provides training for

instructors and, ultimately, promotes the sport of archery.

"Part of our goal is building that solid foundation to introduce kids to archery, which is a life sport," said Joe Courneya, an NDSU Extension Service education program design specialist and coordinator of the state's NASP. "It's a program to introduce the sport of target archery to school-aged young people."

If schools have it as an option in their physical education programs, kids just eat it up, said Jeff Long, Game and Fish Department education coordinator. "The kids enjoy it and that's the slam dunk," he said.

Targeting Archery

Fifty-five North Dakota schools are participating in NASP to introduce target archery to students during physical education classes. Instructors must attend an eight-hour certification training to teach NASP as part of a two-week education unit, typically in grades 4-12.

"This is something they can take and do the rest of their lives," said Grant County High School instructor Priscilla Roth, who first taught NASP to 30 high school students in Elgin last fall. While she has taught archery in the past, the superior archery equipment purchased through NASP has helped her students more easily hit the targets. "They would have learned the fundamentals, but they wouldn't have gotten the satisfaction of hitting the target."

Roth also appreciated the updated training she received through NASP. "It was helpful because it was much more structured than what I did. That structure really helps keep them on task so I thought it was extremely beneficial," she said. "I think the schools are going to benefit tremendously from the equipment and also from the instruction ... it's a real bonus to my program to have had both of those."

Jill Johnson has been teaching through NASP for three years at Sargent Central Public School in Forman, where she instructs grades 4-6 and 9-10. Johnson arranges hour-long physical education classes during the two weeks of archery instruction for each grade.

"They find that with practice, they improve so much," she said. During instruction, students learn proper shooting etiquette, techniques and safety. "I like to expose them to a lot of different activities ... it helps them to find their niche. It's something a little different. For some kids, they find something that they're good at."

In 2000, North Dakota rewrote its physical education standards for schools to include more sports like archery, exposing students to activities they can pursue for a lifetime, according to Courneya.

To expand on the program, North Dakota NASP is aiming for its first spring statewide tournament for participating schools. The top school will have the opportunity to compete at the national tournament in Louisville, Kentucky.

"Archery isn't specific to male, female, athletic, nonathletic, tall or short. Anybody can do it and the equipment is all the same," Long said. "It puts everyone on a level

playing field and it gives some students who aren't as athletically inclined for traditional sports the opportunity to compete and challenge themselves on the same playing field as everyone else."

Everyone gets to play, Courneya agreed. "Most students in the typical physical education programs get a good opportunity or experience in the ball-related sports," he said. "The nice thing about archery is it's not selective to who can participate."

Archery sharpens concentration skills and builds self-esteem among students, too. "It's a brain sport," Courneya said. "It requires concentration skills and it requires kids to

This youngster pulls arrows from the target during a class in Carson after having purchased his own bow after becoming enthused about the archery program offered in Grant County.





Above: Through the National Archery in the Schools Program, schools receive grant funds to help purchase an archery kit which includes 12 Genesis bows and arrows, along with targets, protective equipment and a curtain.

Below: Joseph, 11, Elgin, hones his archery skills during Wednesday night community archery classes. This winter, his Grant County school will offer archery instruction during physical education classes also, thanks to support of the National Archery in the Schools Program.



slow down a bit. In this fast-paced world, archery gives kids a reason to slow down and enjoy something at a slower pace.”

Joseph, an 11-year-old sixth-grader from Elgin, has noticed a change. “Since I started, I realized how much more I’ve been concentrating,” he said, adding that he’s able to focus on homework and gets his assignments done faster, rather than getting sidetracked.

Joseph is excited about NASP being launched in his junior high school in Carson this winter under newly certified instructor Ray Jones. “I’ve always liked archery,” Joseph said. “Other kids can’t figure out why I love archery so much.”

Joseph suspects they’ll soon love it as much he does.

Community Roots

Joseph was introduced to formal archery through the North Dakota 4-H shooting sports program in Grant County, where a community-based archery program draws youth from across the county to the Grant County fair building every Wednesday nearly year-round.

Forty-five youth are enrolled in evening classes supervised by Deb Clarys, a go-getter in Grant County who began the archery program right after becoming certified in 2006. “I think it’s a good program,” said Joseph’s

mother, Cherie. “It’s a safe sport that’s well-monitored. We have good leaders and it teaches them to listen and really focus.”

Every Wednesday, during three separate sessions, Clarys and 10 other instructors coach youth ages 4-15. She also leads a newly-formed Bull’s-eye 4-H Club, which focuses on archery. With 19 members, the club is the first of its kind in North Dakota. “The thing that’s so amazing about this is there’s always somebody willing to help and lend a hand,” Clarys said. “It’s brought such an interesting cross section of people together.”

It’s community and 4-H programs like these that help students extend their passion for archery beyond the schools, which is something state leaders encourage.

The partnership between NDSU and the Game and Fish Department is the first in the nation where 4-H has taken the lead and the Department has partnered with them in the endeavor, Long said. “This one works really well because 4-H has its shooting sports program already established across the state with various forms of shooting,” he said.

The Game and Fish Department encourages NASP and 4-H archery programs as gateway activities to other shooting sports and as natural venues to discuss wildlife management. Long is also developing a curriculum that will introduce arrow construction techniques into the classroom to add to the NASP program. Applicable to elementary schools, the project will teach students how to make and paint their own arrows. Students would learn more about art, Native American history, wildlife and math during the project. “This is a natural fit for us,” he said. “I’m definitely excited about it.”

With \$45,000 dedicated to NASP this biennium, the Game and Fish Department has two packages of grant funds available. The first is for a single school and includes 50 percent of the cost of purchasing an archery kit, which includes 12 bows, targets, arrows, protective gear and a curtain to hang behind the targets to stop the arrows. The kit, which costs \$2,800, is made available to each school.

The second package is made available to three or more schools that are NASP partners. Each partnership provides \$300 and the Game and Fish then provides funds to purchase the archery kit along with an enclosed trailer to transport and store equipment. “Having three, four or sometimes five schools or partners is definitely a good

thing,” Long said. “It increases the number of participants with the same amount of money.”

Two Grant County schools and Flasher will be the first group of schools to take delivery of a trailer purchased under the group grant. Roth shares archery equipment with Jones in Carson and Todd Wolf in Flasher. The same equipment is used for the community program.

More than 150 youth have taken part in Grant County’s archery program through various venues. “We have a core group of kids here who are really, really dedicated to it; they just live and breathe it,” Clarys said. “We get so much positive reinforcement. The kids are happy, they enjoy this so much; it’s fun to see their enthusiasm and their excitement.”

The NASP grants are critical to getting the program launched throughout the state, Courneya said. “One of the biggest challenges to our rural school systems is having the resources to implement a program like this,” he said.

And North Dakota is unique in its NASP partnership with community programs. Forty-eight of North Dakota’s 53 counties have a shooting sports program. It is the

largest and fastest-growing 4-H program in the state, Courneya said. “North Dakota is an outdoor state so people here are oriented to outdoor-related activities,” he said. “Shooting sports are a natural draw for kids.”

Students can now take their bows and arrows to the collegiate level. The North Dakota Bowhunters Association is providing startup funds to assist two groups with seed money to establish collegiate programs. North Dakota State University has become the first institution to launch a collegiate archery club and is moving toward participating in tournaments and other activities. The club has approximately 100 members.

“We’re anticipating it will be a recruitment tool for colleges taking advantage of it,” Courneya said.

Seeing the program expand so quickly, locally and statewide, encourages Clarys.

“They’re doing an excellent job with their philosophy,” Clarys said of NASP. “They’re bringing it into the 4-H club, they’re bringing it into the communities and they’re bringing it in at the grass roots. Let’s grow this; let’s build it.”

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Forty-five students are learning more about the sport of archery through community classes in Grant County, which are offered through the 4-H shooting sports program. Grant County’s schools, along with Flasher, have also partnered to begin offering archery instruction through the National Archery in the Schools Program.

